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FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL--A SECOND STATEMENT OF POLICY.

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TWO POLICY STATEMENTS ARE INCLUDED IN THIS BRIEF DOCUMENT. THE FIRST, PREPARED IN 1956, LISTS QUALIFICATIONS FOR FLES PROGRAMS. THE 1961 STATEMENT OUTLINES OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES OF FLES PROGRAMS, AND CONCENTRATES ON SEQUENCE, ARTICULATION, EXPERIMENTATION IN PROGRAMS AND METHODS, AND FLES TEACHERS. (AS)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:

A SECOND STATEMENT OF POLICY

A. Five Years Later. Since the publication in 1956 of the first MLA statement on FLES (see below) there has been increasing awareness of the need for an early start to foreign language learning. There is equal awareness of the dangers of inadequate attempts to meet this need. Hundreds of communities have ignored our warning against "faddish aspects of this movement" and our insistence upon "necessary preparations". Many of the resulting programs have been wasteful and disappointing, and they have misled many citizens about the nature and value of foreign-language learning.

B. Redefinition. We must sharpen our definition of FLES. It is not an end in itself but the elementary-school (K-6) part of a language-learning program that should extend unbroken through grade 12. It has 15- or 20-minute sessions at least three times a week as an integral part of the school day. It concerns itself primarily with learning the four language skills, beginning with listening and speaking. Other values (improved understanding of language in general, intercultural understanding, broadened horizons), though important, are secondary.

C. FLES in Sequence. We believe that FLES, as here defined, is an essential part of the long sequence, ten years or more, needed to approach mastery of a second language in school. There is good evidence that the learning of a second language considerably quickens and eases the learning of a third language, even when there is little or no relation between the languages learned. Since children imitate skillfully and with few inhibitions in the early school years, the primary grades (K-3) are the ideal place to begin language learning, and the experience is in itself exciting and rewarding.

D. Priority. If a school system cannot provide both a FLES program and a six-year elementary-school foreign language sequence (grades 7-12), it should work first toward establishing the grade 7-12 sequence. Unless there is a solid junior- and senior-high-school program of foreign language learning with due stress on the listening and speaking skills and fully articulated with the previous instruction, FLES learnings wither on the vine.

FL 000 845

E. Articulation. It requires: 1) a foreign-language program in grades 7 and 8 for graduates of FLES, who should never be placed with beginners at any grade level; 2) a carefully planned coordination of the FLES and secondary-school programs; 3) a frequent interchange of visits and information among the foreign-language teachers at all levels; 4) an overall coordination by a single foreign-language supervisor or by a committee of administrators. These cooperative efforts should result in a common core of language learning that will make articulation smooth and effective.

F. Experimental Programs. Experimentation is desirable in education, but we now know enough about FLES methods and materials to obviate

the need for "pilot" or "experimental" programs if these adjectives mean no more than "tentative" or "reluctant". If a shortage of teachers makes it impossible to offer instruction to all the pupils in a grade, a partial FLES program is an acceptable temporary expedient, but it will pose a special scheduling problem in grade 7. An "experimental" program should be a genuine experiment, not a desperate, inadequately planned program instituted by community pressure against the advice of language authorities in the field.

Experimentation in methods should be undertaken only after teachers and administrators are thoroughly familiar with current theories of foreign-language learning and with current practices in successful FLES programs. The development of experimental teaching materials should be undertaken only after teachers are thoroughly familiar with existing materials.

G. The Teacher. Ideally he should be an expert in the foreign language he teaches, with near-native accent and fluency, and also skillful in teaching young children. Few teachers are currently expert in both areas. If a teacher's foreign-language accent is not good, he should make every effort to improve it, and meanwhile he should rely on discs or tapes to supply authentic model voices for his pupils. But since language is communication, and a child cannot communicate with a phonograph or tape recorder, no FLES learning can be wholly successful without the regular presence in the classroom of a live model who is also an expert teacher. The shortage of such doubly skilled teachers is the most serious obstacle to the success of FLES. To relieve this shortage every institution that trains future elementary-school teachers should offer a major in one or more foreign languages.

H. Cautions. A FLES program should be instituted only if: 1) it is an integral and serious part of the school day; 2) it is an integral and serious part of the total foreign-language program in the school system; 3) there is close articulation with later foreign-language learning; 4) there are available FL specialists or elementary-school teachers with an adequate command of the foreign language; 5) there is a planned syllabus and a sequence of appropriate teaching materials; 6) the program has the support of the administration; 7) the high-school teachers of the foreign language in the local school system recognize the same long-range objectives and practise some of the same teaching techniques as the FLES teachers.

The need for a revised statement on FLES was the subject of a conference on 27 and 28 January 1961. Participants in this conference: Theodore Anderson, Emma Birkmaier, Nelson Brooks, Josephine Bruno, Dorothy Chamberlain, Austin E. Fife, Elton Hocking, Elizabeth Keesee, Margit W. MacRae, Kenneth W. Mildenberger, Ruth Mulhauser, William R. Parker, Filomena Peloro, Gordon R. Silber, G. Winchester Stone Jr., Mary P. Thompson, W. Freeman Twaddel, Donald D. Walsh, Helen B. Yakobson.

The statement was developed and authorized by the Advisory and Liaison Committees of the Modern Language Association, whose members are Theodore Anderson, William B. Edgerton, Austin E. Fife, John G. Kuntsmann, William R. Parker, Norman P. Sacks, Gordon R. Silber, Jack M. Stein, Louis Tenenbaum, W. Freeman Twaddell, and Helen B. Yakobson.

FLs IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

After more than three years of studying a variety of reports on the teaching of foreign languages in the public elementary schools, we express our approval of this popular movement in American education. In our judgment the movement deserves the support of parents and educational administrators because:

1) it recognizes the evidence concerning the process of language learning, introducing study of a second language to children at an age when they are naturally curious about language, when they have fewest inhibitions, and when they imitate most easily new sounds and sound patterns:

2) it recognizes the fact that real proficiency in the use of a foreign language requires progressive learning over an extended period.

It is our further judgment that the public should be warned against faddish aspects of this movement. No new venture in American education can long prosper without the wholehearted support of parents, teachers, and educational administrators in a given community. Proponents of foreign language study in the elementary schools should not, therefore, initiate programs until

1) a majority of the parents concerned approve at least an experimental program, and

2) local school boards and administrators are convinced that necessary preparations have been made.

Necessary preparations include:

1) recruitment of an adequate number of interested teachers who have both skill in guiding children and the necessary language qualifications.

2) availability of material appropriate to each age level, with new approaches and a carefully planned syllabus for each grade, and

3) adequate provisions for appraisal.

The success of existing programs thus initiated, prepared for, and appraised convinces us of the urgent need of providing, for children who have the ability and desire, the opportunity for continuous progress in language study into and through junior and senior high school.

(Reprinted from "FL Program Policy", PMLA.) LXXI, No. 4, Part 2, Sept. 1956.)